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ABSTRACT

Alaska's "The Early Years, The Critical Years" conference was designed to educate participants about current brain research, give them an opportunity to discuss public policy with state administrators, provide a forum to develop recommendations and activities to support young children in Alaska, and offer quality training about early development. These proceedings summarize information presented at the conference, provide recommendations and activities that can be used to support healthy growth and development of all children, and provide resources that participants can use for additional training. Part 1 of the proceedings details conference highlights in three areas: (1) key findings about current brain research; (2) Alaska's commitment to children; and (3) recommendations for the future. Part 2 presents the key lessons learned at the conference, recommendations from participants, and suggested activities developed by discussion groups. Topics include: (1) public awareness; (2) parent and family support; (3) quality early care and education; (4) windows of opportunity or critical periods; (5) education and training for adults; (6) health care; (7) child abuse and neglect; (8) primary prevention; (9) early intervention; (10) special needs and disabilities; (11) program and service delivery; (12) community support; (13) work place/business support; and (14) public policy. Appended to the proceedings are lists of the steering committee members, conference sponsors, and conference participants attending a training of trainers session. (KB)

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CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

The Early Years, The Critical Years

Implications of Brain Research on Early Childhood Policy and Practice in Alaska

PS 027724

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CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

The Early Years, The Critical Years

Implications of Brain Research on Early Childhood Policy and Practice in Alaska

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Acknowledgements

The Early Years, The Critical Years Conference owes its success to a long and diverse list of people and organizations. Their collective energy, knowledge, and commitment helped to build these three days into a conference that will make a difference in the lives of our youngest children and their families. To all of the following individuals and groups, our grateful thanks:

- Each one of the 600+ conference participants who, on a daily basis, support the healthy growth and development of young children.
- The conference steering committee whose vision and dream it has been for many years to have a conference devoted to our youngest and most vulnerable children.
- The workshop trainers, educators and keynote speakers who serve as mentors and guides for those who work with young children.
- Governor Tony Knowles, Lt. Governor Fran Ulmer, and the Knowles-Ulmer Children's Cabinet whose personal commitment to children is demonstrated in their professional lives.
- The conference sponsors who donated time, funding and support, and without whom this conference would not have been possible.
- Nine Star Enterprises who made all of the bits and pieces fit together.

Note: a list of registered conference participants can be obtained by contacting Shari Paul, Special Assistant to the Children's Cabinet, at 465-4870, e-mail: spaul@comregaf.ak.us. A complete list of conference sponsors and steering committee members can be found in the appendices.

Introduction

On September 23-25, 1998, over 600 Alaskans gathered in Anchorage to attend the first statewide conference about our youngest children, age birth to three focusing on early brain development. The conference was designed to:

- Educate participants about current brain research and how the experiences a child receives during the first three years of life influence brain growth and development.
- Give participants an opportunity to hear and discuss public policy with top state administrators and policy makers.
- Provide a forum for participants to develop recommendations and activities to support the healthy growth and development of young children throughout Alaska.
- Offer quality training and education workshops about early childhood development.
- Continue the momentum of the conference by publishing the conference proceedings, which include action items and activities participants can use in their personal and professional lives.

Conversations between participants weeks and months after the conference illustrate the importance of the current information about early brain development, and the implications it has for future policy and practice. This document is intended to keep the momentum of the conference rolling by summarizing the information presented at the conference, providing recommendations and activities that can be used to support the healthy growth and development of all children, and providing resources participants can use for additional training and information.

Conference Participant Comment . . .

Children just need a chance for a good life—only adults can give them one.

Part I. Conference Highlights

The opening session of "The Early Years, The Critical Years" conference was devoted to educating participants about brain development during the first three years of a child's life and the implications of that new knowledge for families, child care providers, businesses, communities and public policy. Key information about current knowledge and practice concerning young children was presented by experts in the field of neuroscience, child development, early childhood education, and public policy and practice. The keynote presenters included:

- Dr. James L. McGaugh, Director of the Center for the Neurobiology of Learning and Memory at the University of California, Irvine;
- Nina Sazer O'Donnell, M.Ed., Senior Associate at the Families and Work Institute, New York;
- Dr. Ron Lally, Director, Center for Child and Family Studies at WestEd, California;
- Dorothy Routh, Director, Florida Starting Points Initiative and Faculty, Florida State University.

It is not possible to duplicate the collective knowledge and experience of the keynote speakers, or to restate all of the information presented in their remarks in these proceedings. The following information provides only a brief summary about early brain development and its implications.

Keynote Presenter—James McGaugh

Key Findings About Current Brain Research

There are new discoveries about early brain growth and development.

During the last ten years, the field of neuroscience has gained more knowledge about early brain growth and development than ever before. These new discoveries have been aided, in part, by new research tools and technologies such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and Positron Emission Tomography, or PET scan. These tools have allowed scientists to observe brain structure and function in greater detail, and have provided new insights into how the brain develops and functions. These stunning new discoveries about the brain, combined with many years of early childhood knowledge and practice and a growing concern about the well-being of young children, have led to new insights about growth and development during the first three years of a child's life.

Human development is a delicate dance between nature and nurture.

For many years, parents, educators, neuroscientists, child development specialists, and others have debated about what controls the growth and development of the human brain. Most of our thinking about the brain has been driven by old beliefs — that our genetic code (nature) determines how our brain develops, and that in turn determines how we will interact with the world around us. Research now shows that

our genetic code only controls brain growth up to a certain point. Nature is the dominant partner during prenatal brain growth and development. But once a child is born, a child's daily experiences and environment (nurture) interact with his/her genetic endowment to stimulate brain growth and development. Nature may open the doors, but experiences allow a child to walk across the threshold.

The greatest period of brain growth and development is during the first three years of life.

At birth, the brain is remarkably unfinished — only those parts of the brain that are necessary for survival are functioning. Our genetic codes have directed the brain to complete those circuits that control heart rate, breathing, reflexes, and body temperature. A baby can see, hear and smell— but only dimly. During the next three years, the brain will grow and develop at an astounding rate. By age three, roughly 85% of the brain's core structures will be organized.

Keynote Presenter— Dorothy Routh

The basic building blocks of the brain are neurons (nerve cells). Neurons are long wiry cells that carry electrical messages through the nervous system and brain. Every neuron has an axon— an "output" fiber that sends impulses, and dendrites— short hairlike "input" fibers that receive impulses. The neurons are connected by synapses— the plug that allows impulses to flow between them. This elaborate network can be referred to as the brain's wiring or circuitry. During prenatal development, the brain forms about 100 billion neurons, but only about 50 trillion synapses — not nearly enough to complete all of the circuits that are required for the complex tasks the brain must do. Soon after birth, neurons begin to organize and the brain begins to form the trillions more connections needed to complete brain growth and development. By the age of three, the number of synapses in the human brain will increase from 50 to 1,000 trillion. In this way, a child's brain becomes super dense— it contains about twice as many synapses as an adult brain and consumes twice as much energy.

The synapses formed during this remarkable growth period are thin and weak at first. As the child receives repeated stimuli and experiences from the environment, the synapses become stronger until they reach a threshold level. In effect, these connections become hard wired into the brain's permanent circuitry. Those synapse connections that are seldom or never stimulated remain weak and will eventually be discarded by the brain. By the time a child reaches late adolescence, half of all synapse connections will be discarded, leaving about 500 trillion synapses. In this way, the experiences, both positive and negative, that young children receive during the first years of life determines which synapses will be retained, which ones will be discarded, and how the brain will be organized for all future functioning.

Conference Participant Comment

I plan to incorporate the information on brain development and developmental stages into the teen parenting classes I teach so they will understand the importance of early development.

The human brain has a remarkable capacity to change, but timing is crucial.

While learning continues throughout the life cycle, there are "prime times" for optimal development — periods during which the brain is particularly efficient at specific kinds of learning. These special periods are described as "critical periods" when the brain must receive the right experiences at the right time in order to organize and develop correctly. For example, the critical period for wiring vision is during the first six months of life. At birth, connections between the eye and brain are immature and visual experience is needed to "hard wire" the visual system. If visual impairments, like cataracts, cloud a newborn's vision during the first six months, the critical circuits between the eye and the brain cannot be formed and a visual system will not develop. Even if the cataracts are removed later in life and the eye mechanisms are functional, the brain will lack the ability to see.

Each functional area of the brain organizes according to its own timetable and level of experience. During the first three years of life, the brain will develop the neurological foundations for hearing and oral language; motor development, including balance, hand/eye coordination, crawling, and walking; social attachment and emotional response; cognitive functioning, memory, and reasoning; and sensory perceptions such as taste, smell and touch. Each of these foundations sets the stage for future learning and complex activities like the ability to perform a ballet, do mathematical calculations, paint a picture, play a musical instrument, write and read, learn a second language, form strong attachments to other people, become a critical thinker, experience joy/sadness and anger/compassion, and a host of other activities and experiences.

As knowledge about brain development spreads, there has been a tendency to misinterpret some of the key issues, particularly the "prime times for learning" concept. Parents and others may believe that if a child can learn one new word every hour at age 2, then teaching them two words will be better; or using math flash cards on a three year old will speed them on their way to algebra. But more is not always better. Rather, over-stimulating children to learn language faster or walk earlier can interfere with development that is occurring in other functional areas of the brain, or simply be a waste of time. Children absorb new experiences at an age and stage that is appropriate for their individual development; and not all children will reach developmental milestones within the time frames that have been suggested as "prime times."

Children absorb new experiences at an age and stage that is appropriate for their individual development; and not all children will reach developmental milestones within the time frames that have been suggested as "prime times."

Early care and education has a decisive impact on how people develop, their ability to learn, and their capacity to regulate their emotions.

The experiences a child receives during the first three years of life play a critical role in healthy brain growth and all future functioning. More than anything else, children need to have nurturing, responsive, predictable care, and secure attachments to their caregivers. The simple act of picking up a crying infant, holding her close, touching her face and hands, speaking in a calm and comforting voice; stimulates the emotional neurological pathways to become stronger. When a parent encourages an infant to coo and gurgle, neurons in the auditory cortex are stimulated to recognize the phonemic structure of language. Helping a child reach and grasp a toy develops small and large motor skills. Parents are recognized as the primary caregivers for children, and almost all parents have a natural disposition to support their child's growth and development. By paying attention to a child's cues and clues, parents help children learn that their environment is safe, loving and secure.

Keynote Presenter — Ron Lally

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Study after study shows that intensive, well designed, timely intervention can improve the prospects and the quality of life for many children who are considered to be at risk.

In our society, parents are not the only caregivers for children. Today, over half of all children are receiving care outside the home. Caregivers can include extended family members, child care providers, preschool staff, foster parents, health care providers, and others. Because every interaction between an adult and an infant, toddler or preschooler initiates some type of learning experience for children, all caregivers need to be aware of the impact early care has on growth and development. If a child is spending a large part of his day in an environment that is not stimulating and lacking in positive experiences, critical time is being wasted.

Early negative experiences, abuse and neglect, or the absence of appropriate stimulation can have serious and sustained effects on brain growth and development.

Neuroscientists have documented that sustained early abuse and neglect, emotional deprivation or exposure to violence at an early age can interfere with normal brain development in children. If a child's early experiences were fear and stress, then the neurochemical responses to fear and stress become the stimuli that shape the developing brain, eventually changing the structure of the brain. For example, early trauma elevates stress hormones, such as cortisol. High cortisol levels during the vulnerable years of zero to three increase activity in the part of the brain involved in vigilance and arousal. As a result the brain is wired to be in a constant state of high alert. The slightest stress unleashes another surge of stress hormones causing hyperactivity, anxiety and impulsive behavior. While the brain is paying attention to fear and stress, other areas of the brain can un-develop. Autopsies on the brains of young children who were abused early in life revealed regions in the cortex and the limbic system (responsible for emotions, attachments, logic and reasoning) that were 20 to 30% smaller than those in normal kids. Children who are abused early in life or live in un-stimulating environments are much more likely to suffer impairments in: cognitive learning abilities, emotional and impulsive behavior control, the ability to form secure attachments later in life, and physical development.

Evidence about early brain development points to the critical need for prevention and early intervention.

During the first years of life, the profusion of synapses in a child's brain gives the brain exceptional flexibility or malleability. At no other time will the brain be able to master new skills so readily, or rebound from setbacks so easily. If there is a way to compensate for brain injury, disabilities or early negative experiences, the brain can be taught to find it. Study after study shows that intensive, well designed, timely intervention can improve the prospects and the quality of life for many children who are considered to be at risk. In some cases, effective intervention can even improve conditions once thought to be virtually untreatable, such as autism or mental retardation. Prevention and early intervention programs have also proven to be the least costly and most successful way to improve the lives of children.

The necessity for timely intervention has very strong implications for child protective services and the legal practices that support children who are at risk for abuse and neglect. The need for safe, secure environments for young children must be a priority when social service systems consider placements for children who have been, or are suspected of being, abused or neglected.

Research on brain growth has critical implications for improving public policy and practice, education systems and business practices.

There is a wide gap between what is known about early brain growth and development and what is being done on a local, state and national level to support healthy

growth and development during these critical years. For example, research demonstrates that the human brain achieves approximately 85 to 90 percent of its adult size by age three. The highest level of plasticity and responsiveness to environmental influences occurs in the earliest ages. Yet, nationwide, we invest the least amount of our public resources in children under age five. The national average spent per child under age five was $1,472 , compared to $6,567 (in 1992 dollars) spent per child age 6-18. Only about 8% of our public funds are invested in promoting healthy growth and development during the most critical learning years. The new knowledge about the importance of the early years shows that children need and deserve policies and investment of resources that support this critical period of growth and development.

Public spending is not the only area where resources are limited. Child care providers receive the lowest wages, are required to have the least amount of training and education and have fewer regulations governing their work than most private businesses. Analysis of other resources like health care, parent training and education, education programs, and community and employer supports for families with young children, also show a lower level of support for this critical period of human development.

Nationwide, few corporations and businesses have recognized the benefits of developing family-friendly workplaces. Helping employees balance work and family obligations by supporting on-site or near-site child care facilities, allowing flexible leave and work schedules, and providing health, child development and parenting classes for employees can have positive benefits. Documented benefits for businesses include higher job satisfaction, increased productivity, lower turnover rates, and reduced employee absences.

Early education programs and public school systems can benefit from new information about brain research and child development. Middle and high school grades are a prime time to provide new insights into human development to the next generation of parents — before they become parents. Curriculums in preschools and elementary schools can take advantage of "prime times" for learning by teaching foreign languages at a much earlier age when children are still developing language skills. Teachers and educators of any grade level can benefit from information about how children develop and how their early experiences shape their individual learning styles and behaviors.

Keynote Presenter — Nina Sazer O'Donnell

Conference Participant Comment

I am appalled by the fact that 91% of infant toddler care in this country has been deemed "Inadequate," and 40% "harmful"... especially in light of the overwhelming and exciting evidence that infant development is so critical in life long success. I have decided I must become more politically active...to do what I can to help elect candidates who are seriously committed to our youngest children.

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Setting the Stage for Change — Alaska's Commitment to Children

The success of any conference does not just depend on educating and training the people who attend. Success also hinges on positive changes that happen as a result of new information and new insights gained at a conference. For real change to happen, participants must have the support of policy makers, elected officials, program managers and others who are responsible for developing public policy and investing resources. Alaska is very fortunate to have support for, and commitment to, our youngest children from the highest levels of policy makers and elected officials. Alaska's Governor, Lt. Governor, and the Knowles-Ulmer Children's Cabinet, were active supporters and participants in this conference. The opening session of the conference featured presentations by Lt. Governor Fran Ulmer and Governor Tony Knowles.

....There is mounting evidence about the importance of the birth to three age group — yet, the evidence is not getting as much attention as it deserves. Instead, we seem to be conducting business as usual in our nation.

Lieutenant Governor Fran Ulmer — A Call to Action

Lt. Governor Fran Ulmer has always been one of Alaska's most outspoken and respected advocates for children and their families. Her opening remarks at the conference served not only to reinforce the goals of the conference but to create an atmosphere charged with energy and determination that continued on through the remaining days of the conference. Following are excerpts from Lt. Governor Ulmer's speech.

....There is mounting evidence about the importance of the birth to three age group — yet, the evidence is not getting as much attention as it deserves. Instead, we seem to be conducting business as usual in our nation. One hundred years ago, 70% of the population lived in small communities and family relationships were more stable. Extended family— grandparents, aunts, cousins — usually lived within close proximity to one another. As a result, caregivers for young children were available in the home. For a long period of time, family and community structures changed very little. By 1960, more families were working in manufacturing jobs, but most individu-

als still lived in their home communities, and family support systems remained intact. Only 1% of America's children experienced divorce. The next decades, however, have seen some dramatic changes to our family structures that can no longer be ignored: over half of all children live at least 5 years in single parent households, 27% of children live with unmarried mothers, 66% of all preschoolers have working mothers, and 50% of all mothers are back in the workforce within the first year of a child's life. Other nations recognize these changes in family structure and have built policies and programs to meet the needs of their changing families. For example, some countries have one year maternity leave policies, child care holds the same professional status as higher education, training and retirement plans are part of a child care provider's employment package.

Our nation's public policies, public opinions and public laws still assume we are living in the 1950's when most children were cared for in the home and poverty and poor health was not a national concern. Today a quarter of families with children under three live in poverty, a total of 2.2 million children under the age of three have no health insurance, 25% of all two-year old children are not immunized, nine out of a thousand infants die before age one, an employee in a fast food restaurant makes more money than a child care provider, the highest rates of employee turnover can be found in the child care world, infant and toddler care for the majority of children in out of home care has been found substandard.

The alarming result of our attitudes shows up in the grimmest statistics: the level of violence in our society is higher than ever before and higher than any other industrialized nation; the U.S. has more gun related deaths of young children; school shootings, unheard of in other countries, are becoming commonplace in the U.S.; the majority of individuals in prisons in the U.S. and Alaska do not have a high school diploma, and 80% have experienced physical or sexual abuse as children; more children are spending more time in front of the television set and the level of violent programming on TV is higher and more graphic than ever before; and community violence is increasing every year.

All of these statistics prove what is being talked about in this conference — when young children experience inadequate nurturing, receive substandard care, are victims of family or community violence and cannot gain access to prevention and early intervention programs, their futures are very grim and scary.

Our greatest challenge in the next century is turning this knowledge about the early development of children into action plans that reach into every home and into every baby's life. We can no longer tolerate even one child not having the love and care he or she needs to grow into a healthy and responsible adult. Childhood, in all its wonder and magic, is the most basic human right that we must guarantee as a society, and it is the responsibility of each person at this conference to protect and provide the right to a healthy and happy childhood.

Lt. Governor Fran Ulmer

Our greatest challenge in the next century is turning this knowledge about the early development of children into action plans that reach into every home and into every baby's life.

Conference Participant Comment . . .

I'm glad I have the privilege of working with infants and toddlers because there is so much hope that quality care during those years will affect their lives, our lives—life.

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Governor Tony Knowles

Governor Tony Knowles — 1998 State of the Child Address

In 1995, Governor Knowles delivered his first statewide speech dedicated solely to Alaska's children. His continuing commitment to children and families since that first speech, have helped to establish a precedent for the state — an annual State of the Child Address. Each year his speeches serve to remind us that, in Alaska, planning for the future of our children is as important as planning the budget, the economy, and other affairs of the state. This year, the conference served as an appropriate forum for Governor Knowles to deliver his third official State of the Child Address. This third address cataloged and celebrated the progress the state has made on children's issues, and outlined some important new steps the administration will propose to build a better future for Alaska's children. Among the successes the Governor highlighted in his speech were:

- An active Children's Cabinet that brings the needs of Alaska's kids to the table in every top level policy discussion.
- The Alaska Children's Trust, an $8 million trust that uses the interest generated from the account to fund community driven projects to prevent child abuse and neglect.
- The Governor's Conference on Youth and Justice that led to some important legal and policy initiatives to help prevent juvenile crime.
- A $1 per pack state tax on cigarettes to help prevent children from using tobacco.
- The convening of this conference to focus more attention on brain research and the importance of early childhood development.
- A statewide education summit that paved the way for the Quality Schools Initiative and the biggest increase in classroom funding in a decade.
- More juvenile treatment beds to make sure young offenders get the help they need.
- A statewide domestic violence summit, a tough new law and more resources to help break the cycle of family violence.
- The Smart Start Initiative — a three-pronged approach to improve outcomes for children, including: expanded health care for pregnant women and uninsured children; investing in proven prevention programs that help break the cycle of abuse and neglect; better child protection laws and more resources to help intervene swiftly and forcefully when children are in danger.

Building on these past successes, the Governor and his administration have highlighted the following priority areas for continued improvements during the next year: improved child health outcomes through the continuation of health insurance for uninsured children and pregnant women, expanded proven prevention programs, continued emphasis on quality improvements for Alaska's schools, and zero tolerance for the abuse and neglect of children. Some specific strategies that will be used to accomplish these goals are:

- To continue to address and reduce incidents of child abuse and neglect by answering every report of harm to children and committing the necessary resources to do so.
- To expand the use of our schools by requiring every school district to have solid programs in place to help struggling students by doing whatever it takes, summer school, night school, Saturday or early morning classes.
- To increase access to health care for all uninsured children and pregnant women. By next March, 94% of Alaska's children will have access to basic health care. To make sure the

remaining 6% have that same opportunity, ideas such as insurance pooling plans will be thoroughly explored.

- To develop aggressive plans and actions to eliminate the pain and lifelong limitations inflicted on children as a result of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. The first steps that will be taken are to expand alcohol treatment programs for women, increase public awareness about FAS, promote the philosophy that women should not carry the burden for prenatal health alone — spouses, parents, family members, friends and communities — all have the responsibility to prevent the tragedy of FAS birth defects.
- To renew the commitment begun in the Smart Start Initiative by expanding proven prevention programs like Head Start, Healthy Families and child care.
- To promote quality early care for young children through proposing to the legislature:
  - a 5% rate increase for licensed child care providers to pay for continuing improvements using funds from welfare reform savings.
  - a 50% increase in child care grants to licensed providers, from $22 to $33 per month — this approximately $900,000 will go for learning supplies, staff training, long overdue salary increases and other quality improvements.

The Governor concluded his State of the Child Address by asking all Alaskans to work together on behalf of children:

"As we continue our journey to improve the lives of Alaska's children, I want to leave you with this simple message. Working together, we can make a difference in the lives of children — whether our specialties are providing child care, conducting research, teaching students in the classroom, enforcing the law or shaping public policy... Our mission together is this: We will make sure our children's earliest years are the foundation for success, not failure."

Conference Participant Comment . . .

I am so inspired to apply all the information I have received. I want to help educate parents and provide the support needed to guide people to the correct resources. I won a scholarship through the Governor's council and what I didn't know, but I do now, is that I won a chance to help make a difference in other parents and children's lives.

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Commissioner Shirley Holloway

Plotting the Future for Alaska's Children

Recommendations for Tomorrow

Under the guidance of the Knowles-Ulmer Children's Cabinet, participants moved on to accomplish the conference's third goal — to develop recommendations and activities to support the healthy growth and development of young children throughout Alaska. The Children's Cabinet is made up of a core group of policy makers from the Knowles Administration. They are:

- Shirley Holloway, Commissioner - Department of Education
- Ron Otte, Commissioner - Department of Public Safety
- Margaret Pugh, Commissioner - Department of Corrections
- Mike Irwin, Commissioner - Department of Community and Regional Affairs
- Bruce Botelho - Attorney General
- Karen Perdue - Commissioner - Department of Health and Social Services
- Annalee McConnell - Director, Office of Management and Budget.

The Children's Cabinet represents not only the customary departments that administer state programs for children and families, but also some departments that, on the surface, do not seem to have a lot of responsibility for young children. But, both Commissioners Pugh (Corrections) and Otte (Public Safety), are the first to say that one of the most important ways to reduce prison populations and crime rates in the state through quality prevention and early intervention programs for at-risk children so they can have safe, secure and nurturing environments. Likewise, Attorney General Botelho and Budget Director McConnell understand that investing state resources in children is the key to our future wealth.

Members of the Cabinet acted as team leaders for discussion groups. These groups were asked to draft recommendations and activities for further action in homes, communities and businesses. Part II of these Conference Proceedings contains these specific recommendations.

...one of the most important ways to reduce prison populations and crime rates in the state through quality prevention and early intervention programs...

New Knowledge, New Skills

The second and third days of the Conference gave each participant the opportunity to attend specialized workshops and training sessions. Over 30 workshops were offered by some of the best trainers in the state and the nation — people who work on a daily basis to improve the lives of children. One of the sessions offered was a "Training of Trainers" Program, presented by Dorothy Routh. This workshop was designed to prepare participants to take information from this conference back to their communities and workplaces to train others. A list of participants who attended this course is included in the Appendices. Individuals or organizations who are interested in training sessions can contact anyone from this list for more information.

Part II. Key Lessons, Recommendations and Suggested Activities

Participants were asked to consider not only what government could do to promote the healthy growth and development of young children; but how communities, schools, parents and families, business, service providers and others could contribute.

Participants at the conference played an active role in developing recommendations for future policy based on the information presented at the opening sessions of the conference. They were asked to join one of five discussions groups. Each group had a designated topic:

Education, Learning and Schooling
Prevention and Health Care
Quality Early Development and Care
Family, Community and Business Support
Healthy and Safe Families.

Groups were given the task of identifying key lessons presented during the conference, considering the implications of those lessons, and developing recommendations and suggested activities to enhance planning for programs and services in Alaska. Participants were asked to consider not only what government could do to promote the healthy growth and development of young children; but how communities, schools, parents and families, business, service providers and others could contribute.

Following are the key lessons, recommendations and suggested activities that were developed by the discussion groups. Minimal editing of the recommendations has been done to preserve the intended action of the group participants. These recommendations are not meant to be the final answer, but a starting point for future action. Readers are encouraged to add their own recommendations, and to act on those relevant to their interests. Finally, during the next year, the conference steering committee would appreciate reports from you on action you have taken, or new ideas for future recommendations. Additional recommendations or activities can be sent to Shari Paul, Special Assistant to the Children's Cabinet at (e-mail) spaul@comregaf.ak.us or call (907) 465-4870.

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Key Lesson: Public Awareness

There is a wide gap between scientific research about brain development and public knowledge about the current research. It is critical that information about this research and early childhood development find its way into our homes, early childhood centers, schools and communities. Every person should have basic information about the opportunities and risks of the first three years of life.

Recommendation: Explore non-traditional methods to increase public awareness of new research about brain development.

- Meet with village Elders in each community.
- Use the faith community, church programs and newsletters to educate others.
- Give new parents gifts of books about child development and brain research instead of baby clothes or toys.

Recommendation: Develop a state-wide action plan to educate all Alaskans about brain development and the first years of life.

- Identify all state programs and services that make direct contact with children and families. Require that information about brain research be provided to families through these programs.
- Identify non-state programs, businesses and services that can be used to provide information.
- Break down brain information into respectful and easily understood parenting tips.
- Use existing resources like TV, radio, newspapers and newsletters to promote information.
- "Think outside the box" and identify other resources that can be used to educate.
- Go where children and families are: fast food restaurants, shopping malls, sports programs.
- Initiate a year long, state-wide mass media campaign for Alaska.

Recommendation: Communities should develop action plans to educate residents on brain research and early childhood development.

- Use community forums, celebrations, events, to inform community members.
- Define needs and goals within each community.
- Identify community resources that can be used.
- Develop a calendar of events in the community and target events that can be used.
- Sponsor children's events.
- Hold a community conference on brain development.
- Identify children's programs within the community that currently support sound early practices for young children; identify other community programs that could expand their services to include children's services.

Recommendation: Ask businesses, professional organizations, private and non-profit organizations to help.

- Ask businesses, unions, schools, other groups to include information on brain development in their communications, newsletters, etc. to staff.

Conference Participant Comment . . .

I learned that brain research is applicable, it's not all "rocket science." It can really change the way I interact with families and children.

Key Lesson: Parent and Family Support

All parents and families need support to be their children's most important influence.

Parents and families are the brain's first and most important influence. Even before birth, a child's environment influences the growth and development of the brain. The care, nourishment, attachment, experiences and teaching that parents and families provide during the first three years of life have profound and life-long effects on children. All parents and families need support to be their children's most important influence.

Recommendation: Provide information on brain research and child development to everyone before they become parents.

- Beginning in middle school and high school, require school districts to expand science curricula to include units on human brain development and the first three years of a child's life.

Recommendation: Promote the health and well-being of all family members.

- Extend health insurance benefits to all uninsured families.
- Strengthen the child support enforcement agency and make access to their services easier.
- Increase availability of individuals and couples counseling services.

Recommendation: Provide education and training for parents on brain research and child development.

- Extend childbirth classes into support groups and parenting education classes.
- Provide free child care for all parenting classes.
- Help parents arrange for transportation to parenting classes.
- Hold parenting classes at the work place during work hours or allow parents time off to attend classes.
- Provide training and education at no cost to parents.
- Require parent education classes for participation in child care assistance, welfare to work programs, or other subsidy programs.
- Identify local experts in the community and develop a team of specialists and trainers to provide education and training, child screening and assessments, and health care education. For small communities with fewer resources, develop traveling teams to provide training.
- Develop a distance delivery or correspondence study curriculum through the University on brain development and child development to accommodate isolated families or those who are unable to attend community classes.
- Develop a state newsletter and other information on brain research that is sent out with all birth registration certificates.
- Relate early childhood development to cultural practices of families and communities.

Recommendation: Expand existing family support programs to reach every new parent.

- Universal access to home-visit and support services.
- Make emergency or respite care available in all communities.
- Explore waivers or exemptions for services like Infant Learning, Head Start, and Healthy Families to serve families who do not meet eligibility requirements.
- Eliminate waiting lists for programs and services.

Recommendation: Identify risks to children resulting from poverty.

- Develop position paper on poverty and the effects on child growth and development.
- Allow parents on public assistance to waive 30 hour work week requirement in lieu of full or part-time educational programs.
- Allow exemption for a parent on ATAP to stay at home with an infant for at least the first year.

Key Lesson: Quality Early Care and Education

Quality early care and education environments are essential for brain growth and development. The experiences children receive outside the home are also important for healthy growth and development. On any given day, over 13 million children under the age of six spend part or all of their day in out-of-home care. Over half of these children are under the age of three. A quality care environment, one that is predictable, nurturing, consistent and enriched with trained, well-paid providers, is not a luxury — but essential for healthy brain development.

On any given day, over 13 million children under the age of six spend part or all of their day in out-of-home care.

Recommendation: Increase public awareness about the importance of quality child care and the crucial role child care providers have in children's lives.

- Provide information on child development and quality child care to parents in prenatal, child birth and parenting classes.
- Health care professionals should provide quality child care information to parents as part of their health care package.
- Businesses, employers, unions and other related groups can provide quality child care information as part of an employment package, through lunch hour mini-training sessions, and other forums.
- Educate policy makers about the link between brain development and quality care.

Recommendation: Provide high quality, on-going training to child care providers that is consistent with the latest research.

- Ensure that all training and education opportunities promote developmentally appropriate practices.
- Using established programs and models such as the CDA program, NAEYC and Alaska Partners, develop education and training standards and career development programs for child care providers.
- Develop minimum education requirements of at least 20 hours annually for child care directors, 15 hours for staff members as a prerequisite for licensing and continuing education requirements to retain license.
- Provide incentives for child care providers to obtain training and education through state/federal funding subsidies or business supported incentives like equipment, books, etc.

Recommendation: Promote safe, quality child care through child care licensing or monitoring standards.

- Require and speed up background/security checks for all providers.
- Publish provider training and scoring of licensing in newspapers.
- Develop different levels of licensing based on training, education, number of children in care.
- Eliminate exemptions for child care.
- Develop formal waiver plans for child care providers that include minimum standards for training, education and safety.
- Revisit state child care licensing regulations and monitoring practices to ensure policies are consistent with new research.

Recommendation: Help to reduce child care provider turn-over rates through non-wage incentives.

- Develop a program for licensed providers to participate in state health insurance and/or retirement benefit plans.
- Celebrate positive practices and high quality programs through media, business/employer sponsored recognition.

- Reduce staff/child ratios through state subsidies.
- Promote community support of child care through safe/accessible playground and recreational facilities, free or reduced public transportation, provider training and education opportunities, and community planning for child care facilities.

Recommendation: Promote quality child care through wage/salary benefits for providers.

- Increase public awareness of the impact of low wages on quality child care.
- Increase public funding for child care grants and subsidies through state budget and legislative approval process.
- Tie increased grant/subsidy funding for providers to demonstrated competency, quality, training and education standards.
- Provide a living wage and benefits to child care providers.

Recommendation: Provide support for parents to obtain and participate in quality child care.

- Provide education and training for parents on quality child care through free community, business and university sponsored classes.
- Model quality child care at all gatherings.
- Provide on-site child care for community events, education and training.
- Ask businesses to allow flexible work/leave hours to attend to child care needs.

Recommendation: Provide quality child care options to meet the diverse needs of children and families.

- Expand care opportunities for infants, special needs children, foster families, respite care through specialized provider training programs, state financial subsidies, and other incentives.
- Address the need for child care options for families who work evening and night shifts, travel for work related reasons, or have ill (especially chronically ill) children through specialized training, employer/business subsidies, provider wage subsidies, on-site child care at the workplace, and family-leave without penalty policies.

Conference Participant Comment . . .

This conference made me want to:

Be the best parent I can be

Start a child care business

Be kind and supportive to and with everyone I meet, especially parents

Spread this information to everyone I meet

Get active in promoting policies that reflect this information

Key Lesson: Windows of Opportunity

While learning continues throughout the life cycle, there are critical times or "windows of opportunity" when the brain's ability to learn is at its highest point. Providing the right information and experiences at the right time (developmentally appropriate practices) promotes healthy brain development. Caution about the concept of "learning windows" must also be exercised. Windows of opportunity do not slam shut at a given point. Learning does continue throughout life, but at a slower and less effective pace. All children should be supported at all ages and stages of development. It must also be realized that more is not necessarily better. There are risks associated with pushing children to accomplish tasks when it is not appropriate.

Windows of opportunity do not slam shut at a given point.

Recommendation: Ensure that all programs and services for young children are developmentally appropriate.

- Review all early care and education programs to ensure they are responsive to appropriate learning and development.
- Use model curriculums such as Head Start to establish appropriate programs that are flexible enough to meet the diverse community and cultural needs in the state.
- Require early childhood training and certification for all preschool and elementary public school teachers.
- Use CDA training models as a starting place for training of early care and education providers.
- Partner with the university system to offer quality early childhood education for early care providers, teachers and educators.

Recommendation: Help parents and teachers relax and not push children to experience things they are not ready to do.

- Educate the public about developmentally appropriate early care and learning environments.
- Do not emphasize "academic" programs as a measure of quality.
- Provide easily understood information on developmental windows or milestones for parents.

Recommendation: Provide positive, helpful information about windows of opportunity to parents and the general public.

- Develop media campaign to get this information to the general public.
- Provide information through training, university courses, and teacher/care giver preparation.

Key Lesson: Education and Training

Education and training for parents, caregivers, early educators and other professionals is key to promoting healthy brain growth and development. Transferring brain development research and information into daily practice in homes, workplaces, child care settings, schools and communities is important. Basic education, along with appropriate specialized training, about brain development and early childhood development must be available to parents, child care providers, teachers, service providers, medical and judicial practitioners, employers and policy makers.

Recommendation: Provide comprehensive, coordinated birth through three programs aligned with sound early childhood practices by increasing training opportunities at all levels.

- Develop statewide coordination position to pull in key players (DOE, University of Alaska, school boards, educators, government, communities, parents, care givers, professional organizations) to plan and obtain funding to make training available.

•~• Require interagency meetings from all players to do needs assessment and define how the recommendation will be practically implemented.

Recommendation: Make available model training/education curriculum on brain development and early childhood development.

•~• Research or develop a curriculum that can be used for middle school and high school science courses on brain development.
•~• Develop a quality curriculum that can be tailored to individual communities that is developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant.
•~• Present information in a sensitive and dignified manner.

Recommendation: Educate policy makers.

•~• Develop information that show the connection between early brain development and support for quality prevention and early intervention programs.

Recommendation: Continue education and training in brain development/early childhood development.

•~• Using the same Early Years, Critical Years groups, plan and conduct annual workshops that are affordable and available.
•~• Explore grants and funding sources for train-the-trainers workshops.
•~• Conduct in-service days at child care centers.
•~• Explore and promote training exchanges between Head Start and child care centers.
•~• Make CDA training and certification more available and affordable.
•~• Have coursework on brain development and early childhood education available through the University of Alaska as part of education programs.

Recommendation: Include information about brain development and research in education/training programs for all rural health providers.

•~• Share information from "The Early Years, The Critical Years" conference with village clinic staff to get them interested.
•~• Share information with tribal councils and encourage a resolution to tribal health providers/ agencies.
•~• Develop training for doctors, physician assistants, community health aides and public health nurses.
•~• Develop a position statement and present to all state and tribal organizations.

Recommendation: Provide brain development information to a wider audience of people who work with young children.

•~• Expand training to include brain development information for police, state troopers, public safety officers, fire fighters, EMT's, social workers, child-in-need of aid lawyers and guardians, etc.
•~• Provide adult education classes for community members, educators, university personnel, tribal native groups, community action and civic groups.

Recommendation: Provide education and training on the effects of violence, abuse, neglect, and stress on brain development.

•~• Require training for all mental health providers, domestic violence advocates, child health planners (Medicaid, EPSDT, etc.), Department of Corrections programs, etc.
•~• Present training to boards and commissions that oversee programs such as the Alaska Mental Health Board, Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, etc.

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Recommendation: Develop a course on early brain development at post-secondary institutions.

- Require training for teachers, administrators and nurses.
- Make training on early childhood development a requirement for teacher certification.

Recommendation: Develop a long-term action plan for education and training.

- Identify all groups/providers that should have brain development information.
- Identify events, conferences, meetings that could be used to provide information.
- Recruit businesses and community organizations to be part of the plan.

Recommendation: Make education and training on brain development part of public school programs.

- Meet with school boards, education associations, and superintendents to discuss brain development research.
- Require brain development information for in-service training for all teachers at all levels.
- Provide specific training to special needs school aides, counselors, and other non-teaching school personnel.
- Provide information at PTA meetings or to other parent groups in the state.

Key Lesson: Health Care

Proper health care during the prenatal period and first 3 years of life is critical for brain development. Providing preventive and primary health care education and coverage greatly reduces many health and safety risks for children.

Recommendation: Severe brain damage resulting from injury is irreversible. Efforts must be made to reduce injury rates for young children.

- Promote public awareness about the consequences of brain injury.
- Expand programs to promote the use of safety helmets and protective gear for sports activities, biking, etc.
- Strengthen and enforce laws for the use of car seats and safety belts.

Recommendation: Provide universal access to prenatal health care.

- Expand existing programs for low-income, uninsured pregnant women so no one goes without prenatal health care.
- Eliminate insurance exemptions to ensure that all health insurance coverage includes pregnant women and infants.
- Develop media campaign to reach and enroll all pregnant women in prenatal care.

Recommendation: Develop incentive programs for prenatal care and education programs for pregnant women.

- Incentive programs could include a combination of health care, education and training. Participants would be required to complete all prenatal health check-ups, attend education and training classes in (at a minimum): parenting, CPR/first aid, nutrition, child development, child safety and FAS/FAE. Participants who complete health care and education components will receive vouchers for groceries, baby clothing, or other incentives.
- Secure funding for incentive programs from state appropriations, business and community supports.

Recommendation: Provide continued health care and support for new parents.

- Develop a welcome baby program through hospitals, health care providers, health aides that provides brain research information.

- Provide at least one home visit for all new parents with follow-up visits, if needed.

Recommendation: Provide health care services or health insurance plans for all families regardless of income or work status.

- Expand health insurance coverage to all families and all children.
- Require insurance coverage to include well baby and well child check-ups and screening.

Key Lesson: Abuse and Neglect

Rich and positive experiences promote healthy brain development. Conversely, research indicates that early exposure to prolonged negative experiences such as abuse, neglect, violence, substance abuse, and successive out-of-home placements can have serious and sustained effects even into adulthood. When children need help, intervention must be swift and designed to provide healthy, consistent attachments during these critical years. Because prenatal and early exposure to substance abuse can have such devastating effects on brain development, efforts to prevent birth defects caused by drugs and alcohol must also be a priority.

When children need help, intervention must be swift and designed to provide healthy, consistent attachments during these critical years.

Recommendation: Expand substance abuse treatment center availability and services.

- Provide on-site residential child care facilities for children whose mothers are receiving treatment.
- Provide parenting education and training on brain development and early childhood development as part of treatment programs at rehabilitation centers.
- Expand residential treatment facilities into parts of the state with no service availability.
- Streamline access to abuse treatment for pregnant women and teens.

Recommendation: Develop statewide plan to address FAS/FAE.

- By March, 1999, in collaboration with tribal providers, state and communities develop a realistic statewide action plan to eliminate FAS births.
- Review state policies regarding substance abusing pregnant women and their partners.
- Expand substance abuse programs for pregnant women so there is immediate response and admission to residential treatment centers.
- Develop a statewide media campaign to educate everyone about FAS.
- Require FAS education in all schools.
- Provide training programs for providers and educators on adapting teaching methods to the learning style of FAS children.

Recommendation: Provide services for the whole family in cases of family violence.

- Require domestic violence offenders to receive treatment services in anger management, conflict resolution, mental health, child development, including brain development information.
- Require services be provided to children who are victims of abuse and family violence.

Recommendation: Child protective services (CPS) workers should be knowledgeable about brain development and the effects of abuse and neglect.

- Provide training to CPS staff (state and tribal) in early childhood development.
- Require university level work in child development as a condition of hire.
- Form partnerships with early childhood programs to facilitate training, service collaboration and referrals.

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Recommendation: Legal system personnel should be knowledgeable about early childhood development, and the effects placement changes and failed reunification have on healthy development.

- Provide training to judges, attorneys, guardians ad litem, and social workers.
- Require university level work in early childhood development as a condition of hire.
- Change state laws to require out-of-home placements for infants and toddlers to meet criteria for forming healthy attachments and minimize trauma for children.
- Fully fund guardian ad litem programs.
- Create and fund more judicial positions for CPS.
- Require state and tribal collaboration for cases which involve both to minimize total time for out-of-home placement.

Recommendation: Ensure all policies, practices and laws consider the risks of abuse and neglect during the first three years.

- Review all policies to make sure they reflect new research about brain and early childhood development.
- Any new policies affecting children should not be approved if they do not include an assessment on the effects of abuse and neglect on early brain development.

Recommendation: Promote interagency information sharing.

- Review confidentiality requirements for each program to allow more information sharing.
- Develop a statewide data system to track kids receiving services that includes input from each program they are enrolled in: (child protection, juvenile justice, Medicaid, etc.).

Recommendation: Provide support to parents with at-risk children.

- Parenting, conflict resolution, and other related education programs should be required for any parent whose child enters the child protective system.
- Provide secure housing for homeless families.

One of the guiding principles to emerge from the brain research is "Do No Harm."

Key Lesson: Primary Prevention

Supporting programs and services that promote healthy brain development through primary prevention should be our highest priority. One of the guiding principles to emerge from the brain research is "Do No Harm." All policies and practices should be geared toward primary prevention, that is, preventing problems from occurring in the first place.

Recommendation: Promote the importance of prevention through more public awareness.

- Develop a cost analysis on the benefits of prevention versus treatment.
- Identify model prevention programs and advertise their benefits.

Recommendation: Require hearing tests for all babies.

- Newborn screening for hearing is now available and is required by law in 18 states. Alaska should explore a universal newborn screening program at no cost to parents.

Recommendation: Provide child and brain development information to everyone before they become parents.

- Require classes to be completed before students graduate from high school.
- Course work should include community service hours at a child care facility, health clinic or other children's service programs.

Recommendation: Make prevention a priority when creating state and local government budgets.

- Educate elected officials, policy makers and the public about cost saving benefits and long term investments of prevention programs.
- Require that budgets for prevention programs be the same size as treatment programs. Include judicial, juvenile justice and corrections programs in budget analysis.
- Invest in Head Start until all eligible children are served — this can be in partnership with the federal Head Start Bureau.

Key Lesson: Early Intervention

Research demonstrates that well designed, intensive and timely intervention programs and services are even more important than previously thought. Risk is not destiny. The brain has an amazing capacity to overcome early negative experiences and neurological impairments when children have access to quality early intervention services.

Recommendation: Expand early diagnostic programs to allow all families access to health and developmental screening and services.

- There should be no waiting lists for services from programs like Infant Learning for any child who is at-risk for developmental delays.
- Set up clinics and programs so all parents can take advantage of screening.

Recommendation: Provide training and education on early screening and diagnostic techniques.

- Provide more training opportunities for providers on new research and tools for at-risk children.
- Provide more training for parents on the importance of screening and early intervention.

Recommendation: Require universal prenatal and neonatal screening for high risk stress indicators.

- Train providers to screen high risk families.
- Provide referrals for all high risk families.

Recommendation: All Alaskan families should have access to adequate mental health services.

- Expand community mental health services so more families can be served without having a DSM-IV diagnosis.
- Expand the capacity of existing programs to provide infant mental health services statewide by providing training to professionals in infant mental health.
- Enlist tribal peoples in designing and delivering tribal controlled and culturally appropriate mental health services.

Conference Participant Comment

I plan to go back to my community and involve the business community in the support of Early Home Visiting support services. This means communicating the research on brain development to a more diverse audience.

Key Lesson: Special Needs and Disabilities

Each year, exciting new interventions are emerging that specifically address a range of special needs.

The brain's plasticity means that children with special needs can be helped to overcome or lessen the effects of many impairments. New insights into brain development have allowed researchers to develop interventions that address neurological impairments such as developmental, hearing and language delays. Each year, exciting new interventions are emerging that specifically address a range of special needs.

Recommendation: Increase screening initiatives such as universal newborn screening, using the ages and stages questionnaire; to identify problems and enable earlier access to services.

- Support identification and tracking initiatives to help ensure children with special needs are identified and have services.

Recommendation: Increase funding and explore ways to serve more children with mild to moderate delays, and those who are at risk for delays.

- There should be no waiting lists for services to any child at risk for developmental delays.
- Respite care needs to be available to families with children who have special needs.

Recommendation: Support parents with special needs children through training, education, and community support groups.

- Provide training opportunities for parents relative to the needs of their child.
- Expand child care opportunities for children with special needs through provider training and financial subsidies.
- Promote community access to all children in natural settings.

Recommendation: Implement a philosophy of teamwork and collaboration across agencies serving birth to age three children with special needs.

- Family support providers and medical providers should work together.
- Promote close collaboration between child protective services and family support providers.

Key Lesson: Programs and Services

Delivery of services for young children must be timely, appropriate and available during this critical period of development. When healthy brain development is at-risk due to abuse, neglect, the effects of poverty, or neurological impairments; children need immediate access to programs and services. Because interventions later in life are more costly and less successful, services for children prenatal through age 3, must have a higher priority in planning, funding and delivery.

Recommendation: Identify model early childhood programs in the state and promote their expansion and development in other communities.

- Identify what programs are working and how they can be used as models.
- Connect groups from throughout the state to train others.

Recommendation: Create a clearinghouse for information, services, and planning of services for young children.

- Require coordination and collaboration for all children's services provided by the state.
- Require that all planning for new services or expansion of existing services be approved through the clearinghouse.

Recommendation: Develop a philosophy of teamwork and collaboration.

- Medical providers should consult with family support service providers at the first sign of problems (ILP, Head Start, Healthy Families, school counselors).
- Share training and education opportunities with all providers in the community.
- Re-evaluate referral systems within communities.
- Develop stronger collaboration with hospitals to get information about services, early care and development to parents.
- Create strong links between existing programs through required service coordination.
- Cross-train providers (law, social services, mental health, disabilities, etc).

Recommendation: Expand early childhood programs through increased funding and support.

- Write letters to legislators about brain development and importance of services and supports.
- Invite legislators, policy makers, and community representatives to visit preschools, child care facilities, and accompany home visitors.
- Video tape program activities and send to policy makers, tribal councils, native corporations, etc.
- Fully fund established programs before starting new ones.
- Encourage tribal governments, state agencies, voters, and legislators to identify new funding sources for underserved areas using existing program models.

Recommendation: Expand home-visiting programs for new parents and families.

- Have universal access to home-visiting through hospitals or other programs for new parents with follow-up support if needed.
- Eliminate waiting lists for people who qualify for existing home-visit programs like Healthy Families programs.
- Find ways to waive requirements such as developmental need, socio-economic guidelines, ethnicity for proven home-visiting services.

Recommendation: Support parents and families that are enrolled in programs.

- Develop a common approach to services.
- Co-locate a variety of family support programs in one facility.

Conference Participant Comment . . .

I plan to inform as many people as I can on the importance of the early childhood years, and of providing the highest quality of care. Every adult of voting age must value children as a national resource and be willing to support only those elected representatives who will work on behalf of children and make a financial commitment to making quality care accessible to every family.

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Key Lesson: Community Support

Children live and grow in communities. Education, prevention, and early intervention programs for children and families that are community-based have proven to be the most enduring and most effective. Enabling communities to have the flexibility and resources they need to create a vision for children, implement action plans, finance their efforts, and evaluate their results deserves community, state and national support.

Recommendation: Develop action plans in each community specific to early childhood programs, supports, and services.

- Communities should develop forums that focus on the 0-5 population.
- Existing community needs assessments or action plans should be revised to include information on brain development.
- All communities should develop action plans to promote early growth, development, and quality care.

Recommendation: Educate the whole community.

- Make sure translators are available when training is given.
- Include legislators and elected officials in training programs.
- Make training and education programs relevant to community needs.

Recommendation: Provide community-based services and resources for parents

- Establish a resource center for parents that may include: lending library of clothes, books, toys and other resources; play groups for children; on-going education programs; health care information and clinics.
- Inventory all community resources for families and develop a hot-line for parents. Use websites to advertise community resources.
- Involve Elders in the community to provide support to parents and volunteer time for children's programs.
- Involve neighborhoods, churches, and community school programs in activities.
- Designate a community liaison to connect parents with resources.
- Target funding for community resource centers.
- Plan for community resource centers to be a center for service referral, coordination of resources, and sharing of information on brain development.

Tomorrow's employees are today's children. Businesses have a vested interest in promoting a stable, healthy, well-trained workforce for the future.

Key Lesson: Work Place/Business Support

Current brain research lends new information about the importance of promoting healthy learning experiences much earlier and providing support to working parents and families. Tomorrow's employees are today's children. Businesses have a vested interest in promoting a stable, healthy, well-trained workforce for the future. Traditionally, businesses have been active supporters of education and training for older children. Current information about early brain development lends credibility to the need to support learning at a much earlier age.

Recommendation: Make life more sane and more liveable for working parents.

- Encourage government and private business to adopt flexible work hours, job sharing, part-time employment options, and shorter work weeks.
- Promote collaboration and partnerships between state government and unions to model family-friendly practices.
- Make job related family health insurance benefits mandatory.

- Recognize the importance of extended maternity and family leave policies along with job security at every place of employment.
- Extended family leave policies should include new fathers.
- Provide incentives to employees who want to attend parenting classes.
- Provide on-site or near-site child care facilities.
- Allow employees time off to attend events with children and participate in child care activities.
- Extend time off to nursing mothers to feed their children.
- Provide meaningful job training for rural residents.
- Develop options for parents, such as salary set-asides, sabbaticals/leave of absences, who want to take extended leave (1 to 3 years) off to stay at home with their children.
- Have parenting classes at the worksite.

Recommendation: Create a link between work force development and quality child care.

- Provide information to all employers on the connection between quality child care and employee/business productivity.
- Ask businesses to adopt and support a child care center or home provider through donations, work-day exchanges, field trips, training fees, and subsidies, etc.
- Identify business leaders for mentoring.
- Encourage businesses to provide on-site child care. Require government to plan on-site child care facilities for all new construction.
- Establish a "Green Star" type program to acknowledge businesses that have family-friendly policies and practices.

Key Lesson: Public Policy

Children need and deserve public policies and actions that reflect the importance of the early years. Public policy, children's initiatives, state and national budgets, legal and judicial practices, early education and care programs all influence the early development of children, especially children who are at-risk.

Recommendation: Make state supported programs and services more responsive and coordinated.

- Consolidate administration of all state and federally funded or administered programs and services for young children in one setting, such as an Office of Child Development.
- Continue Children's Cabinet activities in all future administrations.

Recommendation: Report to all Alaskan's annually on the status of young children in the state.

- Require all future administrations to deliver an annual State of the Child report.
- Publish a Report Card to the Public on the status of children.

Recommendation: Consider the impacts any new legislation has on young children.

- Along with fiscal note on budget implications of new legislation, require impact note on effects, positive or negative, to child growth and development.
- Hold elected officials and appointed administrators accountable for their actions.

APPENDICES

Steering Committee Members

Alaska Department of Community and Regional Affairs
- Patty Rosnel
- Marilyn Webb
- Ruth DeCamp
- Bill Mailer

Alaska Department of Health and Social Services
- Michele Hansen
- Lizette Stiehr
- Claudia Shanley
- Cathy Sullivan
- Lisa Simono
- Jill Holdren

Alaska Department of Education
- Beth Lape
- Gretchen Guess
- Kathi Wineman

The Knowles-Ulmer Children's Cabinet
- Shari Paul

Prevention Associates
- Bonny Headley

Conference Sponsors

Alaska Department of Community and Regional Affairs:
- Head Start
- Child Care Programs
- Head Start State Collaboration Project

Alaska Department of Health and Social Services:
- Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program
- Healthy Families Program
- Public Health Nursing

Alaska Department of Education
Education Commission of the States
- Charles A. Dana Foundation

The Knowles-Ulmer Children's Cabinet
I Am Your Child Campaign - Alaska
Head Start Quality Center for Training and Technical Assistance - Prevention Associates
BP Exploration (Alaska) Inc.
Providence Health Systems of Alaska

Conference Participant Comment . . .

As a previous classroom teacher, I realize how important it is to offer this kind of perspective — brain research — to classroom teachers no matter what grade level or subject they teach.

Training of Trainers

The following conference participants attended a Training of Trainers session at the conference presented by Dorothy Routh. These participants are available to provide training on brain research and its implications on early childhood development to others in their communities and workplaces.

Mary Whitaker, Bethel Community Services
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Conference Participant Comment . . .

Though I came (to the conference) in a professional context, I think I will take home many ideas from a parental point of view. I have learned that I need to step back more often and let my kids be the leader. The conference has also really instilled a desire in me to volunteer in different ways. I don't know if my busy schedule will allow it, but I'd like to donate time at the hospital to hold at-risk infants who may not otherwise get much contact in the early months.

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